

Wilder Ranch - Shops/Bunkhouse
1401 Coast Road
Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz County
California

HABS No. CA-2274-C

HABS
CAL,
44-SACRU,
3-C-

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

WILDER RANCH - SHOPS/BUNKHOUSE

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Location: 1401 Coast Road, Santa Cruz County, California; two miles north of Santa Cruz on the coast side of State Highway 1.

Present Owner/Occupant: State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation

Present Use: This building is part of a 22-acre cultural preserve at Wilder Ranch State Park where dairying and ranch life along California's coast is interpreted.

Significance: Wilder Ranch State Park's ranch buildings, while representative of rural vernacular architecture, reflect a century of traditions associated with innovative and progressive dairy ranching in California.

Wilder and four succeeding generations of his family were quick to adopt the newly developed cream-separator, and the majority of the machinery was water powered using a Pelton wheel and a belt-drive system, including the electrification of the dairy in the 1890s. In the 1930s the emphasis at the ranch shifted from milk to beef stock, as well as thoroughbred horses and artichoke production.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1885-96. The shops/bunkhouse was built between 1885, the year Deloss D. Wilder and Levi Baldwin dissolved their partnership, and 1896, when writer Isabel Raymond described the blacksmith and machine shops and employee quarters in the article "Dairying in Santa Cruz."
2. Architect: Unknown, though this building may have been designed by local architect Edward Van Cleeck who designed the Melvin Wilder house, a building on the property constructed in 1897.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The history of Wilder Ranch can be traced back to California's Mexican period. Once known as Rancho Refugio, in 1836 the land was granted by the Mexican government to the three Castro sisters: Candida, Jacinta and Maria de Los Angeles Castro. Candida had married Joseph Bolcoff, a naturalized Mexican citizen of Russian-Siberian birth. Bolcoff's name is not mentioned in the original grant, but in 1849-50 he took control Rancho Refugio. Bolcoff hoped to disenfranchise Jacinta and Maria in order to clear the claims of Joseph "Jose" Majors, who had married Maria in 1839. Majors had been selling Rancho Refugio property which he did not own since 1848.

Bolcoff sold "undivided interests" in parcels of Refugio to Moses A.

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Meder (often spelled Meader in public records) from 1850 to 1856. Meder bought and sold parcels, and brought his son-in-law Thomas B. Hart into the arrangement. Upon Bolcoff's death, under tremendous legal pressure, his sons sold all their rights to a Charles E. Norton. By that time, perhaps twenty persons, companies, and law firms held claims against Rancho Refugio.

In 1866, Moses A. Meder, et. al, took Charles E. Norton to court to prove their claims on the lower two-thirds of Rancho Refugio. Norton claimed an undivided interest from the Bolcoff estate. Meder represented Samuel Adams, Albion P. Jordan, Isaac E. Davis, Robert F. Peckham, Adna A. Hecox, Thomas Courtis, Maria O. de Cadiz, Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works Company, Richard F. Ryan, George Pace, Richard W. Linton, George Parsons, Manuel L. Brockelbank, W.W. Broughton, Henry Rice, Joaquin R. Majors, George Caldwell, David Caldwell, Daniel Caldwell, R.E. Merrill, E. Bender, and Henry Ryan. A master counsellor appointed by the court reported that none of the above were bona fide purchasers, but that Meder did legally own a two-thirds interest in his purchase, as well as Jordan and Davis; and that Thomas Courtis did, in good faith, give a quit claim to Santa Cruz Petroleum Oil Works, but that he did not legally own the full undivided interest he sold or transferred.

By the late 1860s, the courts were untangling enough of the legal mess of the eastern two-thirds of Rancho Refugio to allow John T. Fairbanks of Sonoma County and Richard H. Hall to begin buying up claims against the property. In 1870, Fairbanks and Hall were able to acquire all of Meder's various claims upon the ranch, plus other leases and liens, including what is now the area of the cultural preserve. Hall then sold his entire interest to Fairbanks. In May 1871, Fairbanks sold his interest to Levi K. Baldwin of Santa Cruz and Deloss D. Wilder of Sonoma County. The two men established (or continued) five dairies on the property. Wilder and Baldwin's purchase encompassed well over 4,000 acres in two distinct parcels.

In 1885, Baldwin and Wilder dissolved their partnership and divided the acreage into "upper" and "lower" ranches. Wilder obtained the "lower" 2,330 acres, including the present state park cultural preserve area, for \$32,000.

The Wilder family owned the property for nearly a century until July 1969, when it was sold to the Moroto Investment Company, Ltd., a subsidiary of Sussman Properties, Ltd., of Toronto, Canada.

The California State Department of Parks and Recreation acquired the cultural preserve area, along with the beaches, coastal benchlands and uplands of Wilder Ranch in 1974 to establish Wilder Ranch State Park.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown, though it is probable that the Wilder family and ranch employees constructed the building.

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings of the building have been located.
 6. Alterations and additions: The basic plans and elevations of the two-story shops/bunkhouse appear to have changed very little since its construction. At an unknown date, the original wooden floors of the carpenter shop, machine shop and unidentified room on the east side of the first floor were removed and left as dirt. The work bench in the carpenter shop was also removed in preparation for restoration of the building.
- B. Historical Context: The Wilder family was progressive and took advantage of new technologies, such as the cream-separator and the Pelton wheel, in their dairy ranch operations. With the construction of the shops/bunkhouse, the Wilder family was able to centralize a number of ranch activities. They located the carpenter, blacksmith and machine shops on the ground floor because here water-powered Pelton wheels (patented in 1880) could provide the necessary power to drive a wood saw, cabinet saw, wood planer, emery wheels, lathes, grindstones, circular saws and the forge blower. One wheel was set up with a belt running to a Thompson-Houston self-regulating dynamo of 110 volts. It provided light for the ranch buildings. At night employees could retire to the upstairs bunkroom. The shops/bunkhouse was close to both the dining room the cow and horse barns. The building played an active role in the daily activities of the ranch.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The shops/bunkhouse is a simple gabled, vernacular structure that contains some of the Queen Anne architectural elements of the larger, more elaborate Melvin Wilder house and the horse barn. These can be seen in the pediment treatment above the set of double doors on the south facade of the building and in the detail below the second-story window sills.
2. Condition of the fabric: Fair; the shops/bunkhouse has been stabilized and given a new roof pending more extensive restoration work. The original interior stairway is deteriorated, as is the second-story floor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story, side-gabled building is about 60' x 20', and 24' from the top of the side gables to the ground.
2. Foundations: Original foundation was 6' x 6' wood plank. This has been

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replaced in the blacksmith's shop, which has a concrete footing and floor.

3. Walls: The front and side facades of the building have horizontal simple drop wood siding. The boards are 9" wide with a groove of 1-1/2" on top (actual dimension). The rear wall (north facade) is vertical board and batten with 12" boards and 3" battens.
4. Structural system, framing: The 2" x 8" (actual dimension) floor joists rest on a wood plate, except in the blacksmith's shop which has a concrete foundation. The north, east and west walls are framed with 2" x 4" studs (actual dimension) on 16" centers. The north facade has 4" x 4" posts with horizontal 2" x 4"s for bracing to which vertical boards are attached. A central beam runs east-west with supporting posts, and 2" x 8" joists run north-south to support the upstairs floor.
5. Porches: Behind the carpenter shop on the north side of the building is a 62" x 120" concrete pad with a shed roof.
6. Chimneys: A brick chimney extends from a forge in the blacksmith shop.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the front/south facade there are three four-panel hinged doors. Each is about 31" x 79". A set of hinged double doors open into the blacksmith shop. Each door has two panels with decorative diagonal boards. Above the double doors is an elaborate pediment with fish-scale shingles and dentil courses beneath the cornices. Two brackets support the cornice on either side of the double door opening. On the north facade there are three single doors that open into every room except the far eastern room. Upstairs, on the west side of the building, there is a set of double doors which hinge out.
 - b. Windows: The south facade has three six-over-six-light double-hung sash which measure 33" x 61-1/2" from the interior frame of the window. Above, on the same side, are three hinged two-light sash that are 33-1/2" x 37-1/2" (interior frame). The upstairs windows have a decorative board below the sill. The north facade has three double-hung sash which vary with two, four, or six lights. The rear window was originally like those on the front. Above these windows are four 33"-1/2" x 30" sash which have two, four, and six lights. On the west facade are two six-over-six-light windows, one on the ground floor and one above. The east facade has one six-over-six-light window on the first floor.
8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The side-gabled roof is made of red composition shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The box cornice and gutters are made of wood. The gutter is partially missing on the south facade and was never installed on the north facade.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: A cupola with louvered openings is above the upstairs west room (painter's room).

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: There are four rooms which functioned as storage, a machine shop, blacksmith shop, and carpenter shop, when viewed from east to west.
 - b. Second floor: Three rooms and a closet were used by ranch employees. The largest room on the east end was used as a bunk room, the middle or foreman's room for card playing, and the west room as a painter's room.
- 2. Stairways: A narrow steep stairway is located in the southeast corner of the storage room on the east side of the building. Large portions of the balustrade and rail are missing.
- 3. Flooring: The floors of the carpenter shop, storage room, and half of the machine shop are dirt. The blacksmith shop is concrete. The other half of the machine shop has a 1" wood plank floor. This appears to be the only original wood floor on the first floor. On the second floor, 1" x 5-1/2" boards run east-west.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Framing and exterior siding are exposed on the first floor. These have been whitewashed. The vertical board interior walls have also been whitewashed. On the second floor, 1" x 5-1/2" horizontal, flat, butted boards cover the walls. The ceiling consists of 1/2" x 4" boards running east-west. The walls on the second floor are painted an ochre color.
- 5. Openings: Doorways and doors: On the first floor there are two sliding doors, one between the carpenter shop and blacksmith shop and the other between the blacksmith shop and machine shop. Upstairs there are two hinged, four-panel doors separating the three rooms.

6. Decorative features and trim: The plain interior trim reflects the functional nature of the building. A series of cabinets and a workbench were built into the carpenter shop, but were removed prior to the HABS drawings.
 7. Hardware: Simple, standard metal hinges, knobs and tracks typical of this period.
 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: Exposed knob and tube wiring with white porcelain light sockets are found throughout the first floor. There is a new electric service box in the east storage room. Running along the center of the ceiling on the second floor is a wood wire molding with screw-in porcelain sockets.
 - b. Plumbing: The water hook-ups for the Pelton wheels are in the machine and blacksmith shops.
 - c. Other: Pelton water wheels powered equipment in the blacksmith and machine shops, such as the forge blower, lathe, grinding wheels, circular wood saws, planer, drill press, and coffee grinder.
 9. Original furnishings: The first floor was furnished with shop equipment, much of which was pulley driven and powered by pelton water wheels. Upstairs was furnished as living space for the male ranch employees.
- D. Site:
1. General setting and orientation: The shops/bunkhouse is one of three buildings facing south along an east-west straight, unpaved drive. The shops/bunkhouse structure is opposite the old farmhouse and immediately west of the horse barn.
 2. Historic landscape design: The building is surrounded by driveways that provide access for the ranch's nearby buildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.
- B. Early Views: There are several early photographic views and drawings of the ranch complex contained in the collections of the California Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Interpretive Services in Sacramento, the California State Library, the Santa Cruz Public Library and the University of California at Santa Cruz Library. Among the images at the California State

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Library is a stereo view taken by the photographer Eadweard Muybridge of the ranch ca. 1882-83 with an earlier building on the site.

C. Bibliography: See HABS No. CA-2274-A, Horse Barn.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

This project was undertaken for the California Department of Parks and Recreation by the Historic American Buildings Survey, under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief HABS/HAER Division, and Kenneth L. Anderson, chief of HABS. The survey team was composed of project supervisor Christian D. Overby (University of Kansas), and architectural technicians Alexandra Kettles (US/ICOMOS University of Edinburgh), Shelley Milling (Mississippi State University), and Steve Eccher (University of Colorado).